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CIA Post Declined By Tower

Reagan Withdraws Gates Nomination; Scowcroft Mentioned

By David Hoffman
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Bowing to congressional opposition, President Reagan withdrew the nomination of Robert M. Gates as director of central intelligence yesterday, and sources said former senator John G. Tower (R-Tex.), who chaired the special review board on the Iran-contra scandal, has turned down the job.

White House chief of staff Howard H. Baker Jr. told reporters that "certain contacts" on a new director are "still under way," but "we do not yet have an acceptance." Informed Republican sources said Brent Scowcroft, former national security adviser to President Gerald R. Ford and a member of the Tower board, was one of several candidates. Scowcroft was out of the country and could not be reached for comment yesterday.

Sources said Tower had been the first choice of Baker, who pushed hard for him, but that Tower turned down an offer from the White House.

Reagan said Gates, currently acting director, requested that his name be withdrawn. In a letter to the president, Gates cited "strong sentiment in the Senate" to hold up his confirmation until after the Senate select committee on the Iran affair completes its investigation. Gates said "a prolonged period of uncertainty would be harmful" to the Central Intelligence Agency.

Later, Gates said it is "imperative that the nation get on with its business" and "that would not have been possible" while controversy lingered over his nomination.

Reagan met with Gates yesterday and said he asked Gates to continue as deputy director. "I have been im-

pressed with the class he has shown under the enormous pressures of recent weeks," Reagan said in a statement. "At any other time, I am certain that he would easily have been confirmed without delay."

The Gates withdrawal came as Reagan continued an effort to recover from last week's damaging Tower board report, which found the president out of touch with actions of his subordinates and said that aides frequently violated procedures in the Iran-contra affair.

Baker predicted that Reagan's nationally televised speech Wednesday will "have a profound effect on the country's perception of his role as president and his future ability to govern." Baker described a draft of the address as "marvelous."

Speaking to reporters during his first day on the job, Baker said he had "never seen" Reagan "more energetic, more fully engaged and more in command of difficult circumstances He has never been better." However, an administration official who attended a Cabinet meeting with the president yesterday said Reagan still appeared to have difficulty coping with the Iran-contra affair.

Former CIA director William J. Casey, who resigned Feb. 2 after surgery for brain cancer, was released Saturday from Georgetown University hospital, a spokeswoman announced yesterday.

Following Gates' withdrawal, Sen. David L. Boren (D-Okla.), chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said Gates had become a "victim of circumstances" because of his role in deliberations on the Iran-contra affair.

"The same kind of questions would have been raised if St. Peter had been working in the CIA over the last two years" and had been chosen to head the agency under the current circumstances, Boren said.

Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), Armed Services Committee chairman, called Gates "a professional caught in a very bad series of circumstances." Among possible nominees, Nunn mentioned retired admiral Bobby Ray Inman, a former CIA deputy director, Gen. William E. Odom, head of the National Security Agency, and Scowcroft. "You couldn't do any better than Brent Scowcroft," Nunn said. "He's certainly qualified."

[United Press International reported last night that Inman said he would not accept the job if he were offered it.]

"I am greatly distressed with the handling of the Gates nomination. The process has been used to the detriment of the performance and prospects of a competent public servant," he said.]

Sen. William S. Cohen (R-Maine), vice chairman of the Senate intelligence committee, said the administration was looking for someone from "outside the agency, outside the bureaucracy—primarily an outsider coming to give policy direction." What is important, Boren said, is a "fresh start."

As part of that effort, Republican sources said yesterday that the White House is considering a plan to have the president make highly visible trips to the State and Defense departments and CIA headquarters after his speech Wednesday night. This would be part of a campaign to rebut the criticism in the Tower report that he has been out of touch with policy-making, and a response to disclosures that he bypassed these agencies.

Staff writers Helen Dewar and Walter Pincus contributed to this report.